

Program Notes from: *The African Continuum presents Images: Sons/Ancestors*
Feb. 26, 1971, Powell Symphony Hall, St. Louis

PROGRAM NOTES

Ancestors and Sons is a concert-ritual prayer in praise of the spiritual power perceived by the Ancestors at the core of the Universe—the heart of the Cosmos. It is this praise that is the core of the African Continuum.

Those concepts and beliefs common to African peoples the world over are the basis of the unbroken continuity of the African Continuum. Foremost among these concepts is the belief in the fundamental spiritual nature of the universe, as well as the attendant belief that man is essentially spirit, and as such basically irreducible.

The African Continuum is therefore those fundamental concepts that the Black Man has created in the universe that reflect his own image. The results have been the great and long-lasting civilizations of Ethiopia, Egypt, Napata – the Medieval kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, Songhay / the Moorish Empire of North Africa and Spain / the current states of Ghana, Kenya, Congo / the liberation movements in Mississippi, South Africa, Detroit, Rhodesia, Brazil.

This strong ancestral base (Africa, the potent Ancestor) is the force for statehood, independence, freedom, and all else that truly reflects the African spirit wherever it is located. It is particularly evident, this African Continuum, in the music of Africans, and in the use of words, images and sounds of Africans.

The African Continuum is a model concept in that it views the cosmos as a totally integrated environment in which all spiritual forces interact. In the African Continuum the concept of death, terrible as it is to the living, is basically the living spirit giving way to the effective “life” of the spirit without the body. There is no “finish,” “end,” or “death” to the spirit, its immortality is as constant as the Cosmos. This concept is aptly reflected in the Akan proverb: “If God could die, I would die.”

The moral sanctity of all life derives from the idea that all is spiritual and that the Supreme Power embodies the totality of the Cosmos in one spiritual unity. Therefore, regardless of how it appears, the African Continuum is essentially harmonious. Men in building their societies endeavor to reproduce this “divine or cosmic harmony.” This is the basis of all ethical and moral behavior in community life. The human microcosm must reaffirm the harmonious modality of the cosmic macrocosm.

The spiritual continuum never breaks down, even when violated on the human plane to the extent of causing unharmonious consequences in the world of men. It is the nature of the cosmos to seek harmony, but the cosmic harmony of the universe is not fully comprehensible to men in its totality.

People of the African Continuum see power as the basis of all endeavor. It is through the use of this power or “life-force,” individually and collectively, that people of the African Continuum seek to establish and maintain their proper relationship to other men, to the force referred to as nature, and to the Cosmos itself. Intelligence is the supreme source of power in man. It is comprised basically of the individual power of experience, but becomes much more effective when generated as the collective strength or intelligence of the community or race. This intelligence is brought into focus through the use of psychic conjuring that employs concentration, objects, word gestures, that are potent in the achievement of desired action, through what has been incorrectly labeled “magic.” The most powerful and far-reaching manifestation of intelligence is the collective religious ceremony, in which collective power summons and brings forth the forces of the ancestors, the forces of their sons, and the forces of God.

It is this bringing forth [of] the power or force of God that is the supreme test of a man’s spiritual power and the power of the collective community, which is comprised, for the greater part, of the ancestors. God is brought forth to empower the community with the spiritual power to manipulate its total existence into harmony with the other forces of the universe. The religious ceremony focuses that power.

It is the invocation of God that rejuvenates, that reaffirms—a **covenant**—a covenant of harmonious and therefore **humane** life for man in the spiritual cosmos.

The ceremony to evoke the power is a **sacred** one, whether it is wrongly termed “magical,” or rightly called religious. The test of the ceremony is its success, whether immediate or long-range, or both. Therefore, ceremony has an importance that goes beyond its drama, its entertainment, its aesthetics, and forms, although all of these components will certainly be a part of what it is made of.

The ceremony in execution is something else again—call it magic, call it religion, call it God.

Tonight you will be witness to a ceremony of Ancestors and Sons—a calling forth of the spiritually dynamic forces and powers of the cosmos, to revitalize, re-strengthen across space and time, that harmonious existence which perpetuates itself as the African Continuum.

—Oliver Jackson